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THE FLAG OF DISTRESS:

A STORY OF THE SOUTH SEA.

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CHAPTER I.—A CHASE.

In mid-ocean—the Pacific. Two ships are within sight of one another, less than a league apart. Both are sailing before the wind, running dead down it with full canvas spread. Not side by side, but one in the wake of the other.

Is it a chase? To all appearance it is; a probability strengthened by the relative size and character of the ships. One is a barque, polacca-masted, her masts raking back with the acute shark's-fin set supposed to be characteristic of the pirate. The other is a ship, square-rigged and full-sized; a row of real, not painted ports, with a gun grinning out of each, proclaiming her a man-of-war. She is one—a frigate, as any seaman would say, after giving her a glance. And any landsman might name her nationality. The flag at her peak is one known all over the world. It is the 'Union-jack' of England.

If it be a chase, she is the pursuer. Her colours might be accepted as surety of this, without regard to the relative position of the vessels; which shew the frigate astern, the polacca leading.

The latter also carries a flag; of nationality not so easily determined. Still is it the ensign of a naval power, though one of little note. The five-pointed white star, solitary in a blue field, proclaims it the standard of Chili.

Why should an English frigate be chasing a Chilean barque? There is no war between Great Britain and Chili, the most prosperous of the South American republics. Instead, peace-treaties, with relations of the most amicable kind. Were the polacca flying a flag of blood-red, or black, with death's-head and cross-bones, the chase would be intelligible. But the bit of bunting at her mast-head shews nothing on its field either of menace or defiance. On the contrary, it appeals to pity,

and asks for aid. For it is an ensign reversed—in short, a *signal of distress*.

And yet the ship shewing it is scudding before a stiff breeze, with all sail set, stays taut, not a rope out of place! Strange this. Just the thought of every one aboard the man-of-war, from the captain commanding to the latest joined 'lubber of a landsman'; a thought that has been in their minds ever since the chase commenced.

For it is a chase: that is, the frigate has sighted a sail, and stood towards it. This without changing course; as, when first espied, the stranger, like herself, was running before the wind. If slowly, the frigate has been gradually forging nearer the pursued vessel; till at length the telescope tells her to be a barque—revealing also the ensign reversed.

Nothing strange in this, of itself; unfortunately, a sight too common at sea. But that a vessel displaying signals of distress should be carrying all sail, and running away, or attempting to run away, from another making to relieve her—above all, from a ship bearing the British flag—this is strange. And just thus has the polacca been acting—still is; sailing on down the wind, without slackening halyards, or lessening her spread of canvas by a single inch. Certainly her behaviour is unaccountable. More than strange—it is mysterious.

To this conclusion have they come on board the war-ship. And, naturally enough, for there is that which has imbued their thoughts with a tinge of superstition. In addition to what they see, they have something heard. Within the week they have spoken two vessels, both of which reported this same barque, or one answering her description: 'Polacca-masted, all sail set, ensign reversed.'

A British brig, which the frigate's boat had boarded, said : that such a craft had run across her bows so close, they could have thrown a rope to her ; that at first no one was seen aboard, but on being hailed, two men made appearance, both springing up to the main-shrouds ; thence answering the hail in a language altogether unintelligible, and with hoarse croaking voices that resembled the barking of muzzled mastiffs !

It was late twilight, almost night, when this occurred ; but the brig's people could make out the figures of the men, as they clung on to the ratlines. And what surprised them equally with the odd speech, was, that both appeared to be clothed in skin-dresses, covering their bodies from head to foot ! Seeing the signal of distress, the brig would have sent her boat aboard ; but the barque gave no chance for this, keeping on without slackening sail, or shewing any other sign of a wish to communicate !

Standing by itself, the tale of the brig's crew might have been taken for a sailor's yarn ; and as they admitted it to be 'almost night,' the obscurity would account for the skin-clothing. But, coupled with the report of another vessel, which the frigate had since spoken—a whaler—it seemed to receive full corroboration. The words sent through the whaler's trumpet were : 'Barque sighted, latitude 10.22 S., longitude 95 W. Polacca-masted. All sail set. Ensign reversed. Chilian. Men seen on board covered with red hair, supposed skin-dresses. Tried to come up, but could not. Barque a fast sailer—went away down wind.'

Already in receipt of such intelligence, it is no wonder that the frigate's crew feel something more than mere surprise at sight of a vessel corresponding to that about which these strange tales have been told. For they are now near enough the barque to see that she answers the description given : 'Polacca-masted—all sail set—ensign reversed—Chilian.'

And her behaviour is as reported : sailing away from those who wish to answer her appealing signal, to all appearance endeavouring to shun them ! Only now has the chase in reality commenced. Hitherto the frigate was but keeping her own course. But the signal of distress, just sighted through the telescope, has drawn her on ; and with canvas crowded she steers straight for the polacca. The latter is unquestionably a fast sailer ; but although too swift for the whaler, she is not a match for the man-of-war. Still she is no tub, and the chase is likely to be a long one.

As it continues, and the distance does not appear very much, or very rapidly, diminishing, the frigate's crew begin to doubt whether the strange craft will ever be overtaken. On the fore-deck the tars stand in groups, mingled with marines, their eyes bent upon the retreating barque, pronouncing their comments in muttered tones, many of the men with brows o'ercast ; for a fancy has sprung up around the fore-castle, that the chased ship is no ship at all, but a phantom ! This fancy is gradually growing into a belief ; faster as they draw nearer, and with naked eye note her correspondence with the reports of the spoken vessels.

They have not yet seen the skin-clad men—if men they be. More like, imagine some, they will prove to be spectres !

While on the quarter-deck there is no such superstitious fancy, a feeling almost as intense agitates the minds of those there assembled. The captain, surrounded by his officers, stands glass in hand gazing at the sail ahead. The frigate, though a fine vessel, is not one of the fastest sailers ; else she might long ago have lapped upon the polacca. Still has she been gradually gaining, and is now less than a league astern. But the breeze has been also gradually declining, which is against her ; and for the last half-hour she has barely preserved her distance from the barque.

To compensate for this, she runs out studding-sails on all her yards, even to the royals ; and again makes an effort to bring the chase to a termination. But again is there disappointment.

'To no purpose, now,' says her commander, as he sees his last sail set. Then adding, as he casts a glance at the sky, sternwards : 'The wind's going down. In ten minutes more we'll be becalmed.'

Those around need not to be told this. The youngest reefer there, looking at sky and sea, can forecast the calm.

In five minutes after, the frigate's sails are flapping against the masts, and her flag hangs half-folded.

In five more, the sails only shew motion by an occasional clout ; while the bunting droops dead downward.

Within the ten, as her captain predicted, the huge war-ship, despite her extended canvas, lies motionless on the sea.

CHAPTER II.—A CALL FOR BOARDERS.

The frigate is becalmed—what of the barque ? Has she been similarly checked in her course ? The question is asked by all on board the war-ship, each seeking the answer for himself. For all are earnestly gazing at the strange sail, regardless of their own condition.

Forward, the superstitious thought has become intensified into something like fear. A calm coming on so suddenly, just when they had hopes of soon overhauling the chased vessel—what could that mean ? Old sailors shake their heads, refusing to make answer ; while young ones, less cautious of speech, boldly pronounce the polacca a spectre ! The legends of the Phantom Ship and Flying Dutchman are in their thoughts, and on their lips, as they stand straining their eyes after the still receding vessel ; for beyond doubt does she sail on with waves rippling around her !

'As I told ye, mates,' remarks an old tar, 'we'd never catch up with that craft—not if we stood after her till doomsday. And doomsday it might be for us, if we did.'

'I hope she'll keep on, and leave us a good spell behind,' rejoins a second. 'It was a foolish thing followin' her ; and, for my part, I'll be glad if we never do catch up with her.'

'You need have no fear about that,' says the first speaker. 'Just look ! She's making way yet ! I believe she can sail as well without wind as with it.'

Scarce are the words spoken, when, as if to contradict them, the sails of the chased vessel commence clouting against her masts ; while her flag falls folded, and is no longer distinguishable as a signal of distress, or aught else. The breeze that failed the frigate, is now also dead around the

barque, which, in like manner, has been caught in the calm.

'What do you make her out, Mr Black?' asks the frigate's captain of his first, as the two stand looking through their levelled glasses.

'Not anything, sir,' replies the lieutenant; 'except that she should be Chilian from her colours. I can't see a soul aboard of her. Ah, yonder! Something shews over the taffrail! Looks like a man's head? It's ducked suddenly.'

A short silence succeeds, the commanding officer busied with his binocular, endeavouring to catch sight of the thing seen by his subordinate. It does not shew again.

'Odd,' says the captain, resuming speech; 'a ship running up signals of distress, at the same time refusing to be relieved! Very odd! Isn't it, gentlemen?' he asks, addressing himself to the group of officers now gathered around.

Unanimous assent to his interrogatory.

'There must be something amiss,' he continues.

'Can any of you think what it is?'

To this there is a negative response. Lientenants and midshipmen seem all as puzzled as himself, mystified by the strange barque, and more by her strange behaviour.

There are two who have thoughts different from the rest—the third lieutenant, and one of the midshipmen. Less thoughts, than imaginings; and these so vague, that neither communicates them to the captain, nor to one another. And whatever their fancies, they do not appear pleasant ones, since on the faces of both is an expression of something like anxiety. Slight, and scarcely observable, it is not noticed by their comrades standing around. It seems to deepen, while they continue to gaze at the becalmed barque, as though due to something seen there. Still they remain silent, keeping the dark thought, if such it be, to themselves.

'Well, gentlemen,' says the commanding officer to his assembled subordinates, 'I must say this is singular. In all my experience at sea, I don't remember anything like it. What trick the Chilian barque—if she be Chilian—is up to, I can't guess; not for the life of me. It cannot be a case of piracy. The craft has no guns; and if she had, she appears without men to handle them. It's a riddle all round; to get the reading of it, we'll have to send a boat to her.'

'I don't think we'll get a very willing crew, sir,' says the first lieutenant suggestively. 'Forward, they're quite superstitious about the character of the chase. Some of them fancy her the Flying Dutchman. When the boatswain pipes for boarders, they'll very likely feel as if his whistle were a signal for them to walk the plank.'

The remark causes the captain to smile, as the other officers; though two of the latter abstain from this exhibition of merriment. These are the third lieutenant and midshipman—already mentioned—on both of whose brows the cloud still sits, seeming darker than ever.

'Isn't it strange,' continues the commander, musingly, 'that your genuine British tar, who will board an enemy's ship, crawling across the muzzle of a shotted gun—who has no fear of death in human shape—will act like a scared child when it threatens him in the guise of his satanic majesty? I have no doubt, as you say, Mr Black, that those fellows by the fore-castle are a bit shy about boarding this strange vessel. But let me shew you how to

send their shyness adrift. I shall do that with a single word!'

The captain steps forward, his subordinates following him. When within speaking distance of the fore-deck, he stops, and makes sign that he has something to say. The tars are all attention.

'My lads!' he exclaims, 'you see that barque we've been chasing; and at her mast-head a flag reversed—which you know to be a signal of distress? That is a call never to be disregarded by an English ship, much less an English man-of-war. Lieutenant! order a boat to be lowered, and let the boatswain pipe for boarders. Only volunteers will be taken. Those who wish to go, will muster on the main-deck.'

A loud 'hurrah!' responds to the appeal; and, while its echoes are still resounding through the ship, the whole crew seems crowding towards the main-deck. Scores of volunteers present themselves, enough to man every boat aboard.

'Now, gentlemen,' says the captain, turning to his officers with a proud expression on his countenance, 'there's the British sailor for you. I've said he fears not man. And, when humanity makes call, as you see, neither is he frightened at a fancied ghost!'

A second cheer succeeds the speech, mingled with good-humoured remarks, though not any loud laughter. The sailors simply acknowledge the compliment their commanding officer has paid them, at the same time feeling that the moment is too solemn for merriment; for their instinct of humanity is yet under control of the weird feeling. As the captain turns aft to the quarter, many of them fall away toward the fore-deck, till the group of volunteers for boarding has got greatly diminished. Still are there enough to man the largest boat in the ship.

'What boat is it to be, sir?'

This question is asked by the first lieutenant, as he follows the captain aft.

'The cutter,' answers his superior, adding: 'I think, Mr Black, there's no necessity for sending any other. The cutter's crew will be sufficient. As to any hostility from those on board the stranger, that is absurd. We could blow them out of the water with a single broadside.'

'Who's to command the cutter, sir?'

The captain reflects, with a look sent inquiringly around. His eye falls upon the third lieutenant, who stands near, seemingly courting the glance. It is short and decisive. The captain knows his third officer to be a thorough seaman; though young, capable of any duty, however delicate or dangerous. Without further hesitation, he assigns him to the command of the boarders.

The young officer enters upon the service with alacrity—something more than the mere obedience due to discipline. He hastens to the ship's side to superintend the lowering of the boat. He does not stand at rest, but is seen to help and hurry it, with a look of anxious impatience in his eye, and the cloud still observable on his brow. While thus occupied, he is accosted by another officer, one yet younger than himself—the midshipman already mentioned.

'Can I go with you?' the latter asks.

'Certainly, my dear fellow,' responds the lieutenant in friendly familiar tone. 'I shall be only too pleased to have you. But you must get the captain's consent.'

The young officer glides aft, sees the frigate's commander upon the quarter-deck, and saluting, says: 'Captain, may I go with the cutter?'

'Well, yes,' responds the chief; 'I have no objection.' Then, after taking a survey of the youngster, he adds: 'Why do you want it?'

The youth blushes, without replying. There is a cast upon his countenance that strikes the questioner, somewhat puzzling him. But there is no time either for further inquiry or reflection. The cutter is already lowered, and rests upon the water. Her crew is crowding into her; and she will soon be shoved off from the ship.

'You can go, lad,' assents the captain. 'Report yourself to the third lieutenant, and tell him I've given you leave. You're young, and, like all youngsters, ambitious of gaining glory. Well, in this affair you won't have much chance, I take it. It's simply boarding a ship in distress, where you'll be more likely to be a spectator of scenes of suffering. However, that will be a lesson for you; and therefore you may go.'

Thus authorised, the young reefer glides away from the quarter-deck, drops down into the boat, and takes his seat alongside the lieutenant, already there.

The two ships still lie becalmed, in the same relative position to one another, having changed from it scarce a cable's length. And stem to stern, just as the last breath of the breeze, blown gently against their sails, forsook them.

On both, the canvas is still spread, though not belled. It hangs limp and loose, giving an occasional flap, so feeble as to shew that it proceeds, not from any stir in the air, but the mere balancing motion of the vessels; for there is now not enough breeze blowing to flout the long feathers in the tail of the Tropic bird, seen soaring aloft.

Both ships are motionless; their forms reflected in the water, so that each has its counterpart keel to keel.

Between them, the sea is smooth as a mirror—that tranquil calm which has given to the Pacific its distinctive appellation. It is now to be disturbed, furrowed by the bow of the cutter, with her stroke of ten oars, five on each side. Almost as soon as down from the davits, her crew seated on the thwarts, and her coxswain at the tiller, the lieutenant gives the command to 'shove off.' Parting from the frigate's beam, the boat is steered straight for the becalmed barque.

On board the man-of-war, all stand watching her, their eyes at intervals directed towards the strange vessel. From the frigate's forward-deck, the men have an unobstructed view, especially those clustering around the head. Still there is nearly a league between, and with the naked eye this hinders minute observation. They can but see the white-spread sails, and the black hull underneath them. With a glass, the flag, now fallen, is just distinguishable from the mast along which it clings closely. They can perceive that its colour is crimson above, with blue and white underneath—the reversed order of the Chilian ensign. Its single star is no longer visible, nor aught of its heraldry, that spoke so appealingly. But if the sight fails to furnish them with details, these are amply supplied by their excited imaginations. Some of them see men aboard the barque—scores, hundreds! After all, she may be a pirate, and the upside-down ensign a decoy. On a tack, she may be a

swifter sailer than she has shewn herself before the wind; and, knowing this, has been but playing with the frigate. If so, God help the cutter's crew!

Besides these conjectures of the common kind, there are those on the frigate's fore-deck who, in truth, fancy the polacca a spectre. As they continue gazing, now at the boat, now at the barque, they expect every moment to see the one sink beneath the sea; and the other sail off, or melt into invisible air.

On the quarter, speculation is equally rife, though running in a different channel. There the captain still stands surrounded by his officers, each with glass to his eye, levelled upon the strange craft. But they see nought to give them a clue to her character; only the loose spread sails, and the furled flag of distress. They continue gazing till the cutter is close to the barque's beam. Nor yet can they observe any head above the bulwarks, or face peering through the shrouds. The fancy of the fore-castle has crept aft among the officers. They too begin to feel something of superstitious fear—an awe of the uncanny!

CHAPTER III.—THE CUTTER'S CREW.

Manned by ten stout tars, with as many oars propelling her, the cutter cleaves the water like a knife. The lieutenant, seated in the stern-sheets, with the mid by his side, directs the movements of the boat; while the glances of both are kept constantly upon the barque. In their eyes is an earnest expression—quite different from that of ordinary interrogation.

The men may not observe it; if they do, it is without comprehension of its meaning. They can but think of it as resembling their own, and proceeding from a like cause. For although with backs turned towards the barque, they cast occasional glances over their shoulders, in which curiosity is commingled with apprehension.

Despite their natural courage, strengthened by the late appeal to their humanity, the awe is again upon them. Insidiously returning as they took their seats in the boat, it increases as they row farther from the ship, and nearer to the strange vessel. Less than half an hour has elapsed, and they are within a cable's length of the latter.

'Hold, now!' commands the lieutenant.

The oar-stroke is instantly suspended, and the blades held aloft. The boat gradually loses way, and at length rests stationary on the tranquil water.

All eyes are bent upon the barque; glances go searchingly along her bulwarks, from poop to prow. No preparations to receive them! No one appears on deck—not a head seen over the rail!

'Barque, ahoy!' hails the lieutenant.

'Barque, ahoy!' is heard in fainter tone. It is no answer; only the echo of the officer's voice, coming back from the hollow timbers of the becalmed vessel. There is again silence, more profound than ever; for the sailors in the boat have ceased talking, their awe, now intense, holding them speechless.

'Barque, ahoy!' again shouts the lieutenant, louder than before, but with like result. As before, he is only answered by echo. There is either nobody aboard, or no one who thinks it worth while to make rejoinder. The first supposition seems absurd, looking at the sail; the second, equally so, regarding the flag at the main royal mast-head, and taking into account its character.

A third hail from the officer, this time vociferated in loudest voice, with the interrogatory added: 'Any one aboard?'

To the question no reply, any more than to the hail. Silence continues—stillness intense, awe-inspiring. They in the boat begin to doubt the evidence of their senses. Is there a barque before their eyes? Or is it all an illusion? How can a vessel be under sail—full sail—without sailors? And if any, why do they not shew at her side? Why have they not answered the hail thrice shouted; the last time loud enough to be heard within her hold? It should have awakened her crew even if asleep in the fore-castle!

'Give way again!' cries the lieutenant. 'Bring up on the starboard side, coxswain; under the fore-chains.'

The oars are dipped, and the cutter moves on. But scarce is she in motion, when once more the officer commands: 'Hold!'

With his voice mingle others, coming from the barque. Her people seem at length to have become aroused from their sleep, or stupor. A noise is heard upon her deck, as of a scuffle, accompanied by cries of strange intonation. Soon two heads, apparently human, shew above the bulwarks; two faces flesh-coloured, and thinly covered with hair. Then the whole bodies appear, also human like, save that they are hairy all over—hair of a foxy red. They swarm up the shrouds; and clutching the ratlines, shake them with quick violent jerks; at the same time uttering what appears angry speech, in an unknown tongue, and harsh voice, as if chiding off the intruders. Only a short way up the shrouds, just as far as they could spring from the deck, and only staying a little while there. Then they drop down again, disappearing as abruptly as they had shewn themselves.

The lieutenant's command was a word thrown away. Without it the men would have discontinued their stroke. They have done so, and sit with bated breath, eyes strained, ears listening, and lips mute, as if all had been suddenly and simultaneously struck dumb. Silence throughout the boat—silence aboard the barque—silence everywhere; the only sound heard being the 'drip-drop' of the water, as it falls from the feathered oar-blades.

For a time the cutter's crew remain speechless, not one essaying to speak a word. They are so, less from surprise, than sheer stark terror. It is depicted on their faces, and no wonder it should. What they have just seen is sufficient to terrify the stoutest hearts—even those of tried tars, as all of them are. A ship manned by hairy men—a crew of veritable Orsons! Certainly enough to startle the most phlegmatic mariner, and make him tremble as he tugs at the oar. But they have ceased tugging at their oars, and hold them, blades suspended, along with their breath. One alone musters sufficient courage to mutter out: 'Gracious goodness! shipmates, what can it mean?'

He receives no answer, though the silence comes to an end. It is broken by the voice of the lieutenant, and also that of the junior officer. They do not speak simultaneously, but one after the other. The superstitious fear pervading the minds of the men does not extend to them. They too have their fears, but of a different kind, and from a different cause. As yet, neither has communicated

to the other what he himself has been thinking; the thoughts of both being hitherto vague, but every moment becoming more defined. And the appearance of the red men upon the ratlines—strange to the sailors—seems to have made things more intelligible to them. Judging by the expression upon their faces, they comprehend what has puzzled their companions. And with a sense of anxiety more than fear, more of doubt than dismay. The lieutenant speaks first, shouting in command: 'Give way! Quick! Pull in! Head on for the fore-chains!'

He acts in an excited manner, appearing nervously impatient. As if mechanically, the midshipman repeats the order, imitating the mien of his superior. The men execute it, but slowly, and with evident reluctance. They know their officers to be daring fellows, both. But now they deem them rash, even to recklessness. For they cannot comprehend the motives urging them to action. Still they obey; and the prow of the boat strikes the barque abeam.

'Grapple on!' sings out the senior officer, soon as touching. A boat-hook takes grip in the chains; and the cutter, swinging round, lies at rest alongside. The lieutenant is already on his feet, as also the mid. Ordering only the coxswain to follow, they spring up to the chains, lay hold, and lift themselves aloft.

Obedient to orders, the men remain in the boat; still keeping their seat on the thwarts, in wonder at the bold bearing of their officers, at the same time silently admiring it.

Balancing themselves on the rail, the latter look down upon the deck of the polacca. Their glances sweep it forward, aft, and amid-ships; ranging from stem to stern, and back again. Nothing seen there to explain the strangeness of things, nothing heard. No sailor on deck, nor officer on the quarter! Only the two strange beings that had shewn themselves on the shrouds. These are still visible, one of them standing by the main-mast, the other crouching near the caboose. Both again give out their jabbering speech, accompanying it with gestures of menace. Disregarding this, the lieutenant leaps down upon the deck, and makes towards them; the mid and coxswain keeping close after.

At their approach, the hirsute monsters retreat, not scared-like, but with a show of defiance, as if disposed to contest possession of the place. They give back, however, bit by bit, till at length, ceasing to dispute, they shuffle towards the quarter, and then on to the poop. Neither of the two officers pays any attention to their demonstrations; and the movement aft is not made for them. Both lieutenant and midshipman seem excited by other thoughts, some stronger impulse urging them on. Alone is the coxswain mystified by the hairy men, and not a little alarmed; but without speaking, he follows his superiors.

They continue on toward the quarter-deck, making for the cabin door. Having boarded the barque by the fore-chains, they must pass the caboose going aft. Its sliding panel is open, and when opposite, all three come to a stand. They are brought to it by a faint cry issuing out of the cook's quarters. Looking in, they behold a spectacle sufficiently singular to detain them. It is more than singular—it is startling. On the bench in front of the galley fire, which shews as if long extinguished, sits a man, bolt upright, his back

against the bulkhead. Is it a man, or only the dead body of one? Certainly it is a human figure; or, speaking more precisely, a human skeleton with the skin still on; this as black as the coal-cinders in the grate in front of it.

It is a man, a negro, and still living; for at sight of them he betrays motion, and makes an attempt to speak.

Only the coxswain stays to listen, or hear what he has to say. The others hurry on aft, making direct for the door of the cabin; which, between decks, is approached by a stairway. Reaching this they rush down, and stand before the door, which they find shut. Only closed, not locked. It yields to the turning of the handle, and opening, gives them admission. They enter hastily, one after the other, without ceremony or announcement. Once inside, they as quickly come to a stop, both looking aghast. The spectacle in the caboose was nought to what is now before their eyes. That was but startling, this is appalling.

It is the main-cabin they have entered, not a large one, for the polacca has not been intended to carry passengers. Still it is snug and roomy enough for a table six feet by four. Such a one stands in its centre, its legs fixed in the floor, with four chairs around it, similarly stanchioned.

On the table there are decanters and dishes, alongside glasses and plates. It is a dessert service, and on the dishes are fruits, cakes, and sweetmeats, with fragments of these upon the plates. The decanters contain wines of different sorts, and there are appearances as of wine having been in the glasses.

There are four sets, corresponding to the four chairs; and, to all appearance, this number of guests have been seated at the table. But two of the chairs are empty, as if their occupants had retired to an inner state-room. It is the side-seats that are unoccupied, and a fan lying on one, with a scarf over the back of that opposite, proclaim their last occupants to have been ladies.

Two guests are still at the table, one at its head, the other at its foot, facing each other. And such guests! Both are men, though, unlike him in the caboose, they are white. But, like him, they too appear in the extreme of emaciation: jaws with the skin drawn tightly over them, cheek-bones prominent, chins protruding, eyes sunken in their sockets.

Not dead either: for their eyes, glancing and glaring, still shew life. But there is little other evidence of it. Sitting stiff in the chairs, rigidly erect, they make no attempt to stir, no motion of either body or limbs; which seem as if from both all strength had departed, their famished figures denoting the last stages of starvation! And this in front of a table furnished with choice wines, fruits, and other comestibles; in short, loaded with delicacies! What can it all mean?

Not this question, but a cry comes from the lips of the two officers, as they stand regarding the strange tableau. Only for an instant. Then the lieutenant, rushing back up the stair, and on to the side, calls out: 'To the ship, and bring the doctor! Quick, quick!'

The boat's crew, obedient, row off with alacrity. They are but too glad to get away from the suspected spot. As they strain at their oars, with faces turned toward the barque, and eyes wonderingly bent upon her, they see nought to give

them a clue to the conduct of their officers, or in any way elucidate the series of mysteries, or how prolonged to a chain. One imbued with a strong belief in the supernatural, shakes his head, saying: 'Shipmates, we may never see that lieutenant again, nor the young reefer, nor the old cox'n—never!'

During all this time those on board the man-of-war have stood regarding the barque—at the same time watching the movements of the boat. Only they who have glasses can see what is passing with any distinctness. For the day is not a bright one, a haze over the sea hindering observation. It has arisen since the fall of the wind, perhaps caused by the calm; and though but a mere film, at such far distance it interferes with the view through the telescopes. Those using them can just tell that the cutter has closed in upon the strange vessel, and is lying along under the foremast shrouds, while some of her crew appear to have swarmed up the chains. This cannot be told for certain. The haze around the barque is more dense than elsewhere, as if steam were passing off from her sides; and through this objects shew only confusedly.

While the frigate's people are straining their eyes to make out the movements of the cutter, an officer, of sharper sight than the rest, cries: 'See! the boat is coming back.'

All perceive this, and with some surprise. It is not ten minutes since the boat grappled on. Why returning so soon?

While they are conjecturing as to the cause, the same officer again observes something that has escaped the others. There are but *eight* oars, instead of ten—the regulation strength of the cutter—and ten men where before there were thirteen. Three of the boat's crew have remained behind.

This causes neither alarm nor uneasiness to the frigate's officers. They take it that the three have gone aboard the barque, and for some reason, whatever it be, elected to stay there. They know the third lieutenant to be not only brave, but a man of quick decision, and prompt to act. He has boarded the distressed vessel, discovered the cause of distress, and sent the cutter back to bring whatever may be needed for her relief. Thus reasons the quarter-deck.

It is different on the fore, where apprehensions are rife about their missing shipmates; fears that some misfortune has befallen them. True, no shots have been heard, nor flashes seen. Still they could have been killed without firearms; and savages might use other and less noisy weapons. The tale of the skin-clad crew gives colour to this supposition. But then the crew of the cutter went armed—in addition to their cutlasses, being provided with pikes and boarding-pistols. Had they been attacked, they would not have retreated without discharging the last—less likely leaving three of their number behind. But there have been no signs of strife, or struggle, seen! All the more mystery; and pondering upon it, the frigate's crew are but strengthened in their superstitious faith.

Meanwhile, the cutter is making way across the stretch of calm sea that separates the two ships; and although with reduced strength of rowers, cleaves the water quickly. The movements of

the men indicate excitement. They pull as if rowing in a regatta.

Soon they are near enough to be individually recognised; when it is seen that neither of the two officers is in the boat; nor the coxswain, one of the oarsmen having taken his place at the tiller.

As the boat draws nearer, and the faces of the two men seated in the stern-sheets can be distinguished, there is observed upon them an expression which none can interpret. No one tries. All stand silently waiting till the cutter comes alongside, and sweeping past the bows, brings up on the frigate's starboard beam, under the main-chains.

The officers move forward along the gangway, and stand looking over the bulwarks; while the men come crowding aft as far as permitted. The curiosity of all receives a check—an abrupt disappointment. There is no news from the barque, save the meagre scrap contained in the lieutenant's order: 'Bring the doctor.'

Beyond this the cutter's crew only know that they have seen the hairy men. Seen and heard them, though without understanding a word of what they said. Two had sprung upon the shrouds, and shouted at the cutter's people, as if scolding them off!

The tale spreads through the frigate, fore and aft, quick as a train of powder ignited. It is everywhere talked of, and commented on. On the quarter, it is deemed strange enough; while forward, it further intensifies the belief in something supernatural.

The tars give credulous ear to their comrade, again repeating what he said in the boat, and in the self-same words: 'Shipmates, we may never see that lieutenant again, nor the young reeler, nor the old cox'n—never!'

The boding speech seems a prophecy already realised. Scarce has it passed the sailor's lips, when a cry rings through the ship that startles all aboard, thrilling them more intensely than ever.

While the men have been commenting upon the message brought back from the barque, and the officers are taking steps to hasten its execution—the doctor getting out his instruments, with such medicines as the occasion seems to call for—the strange vessel has been for a time unthought of.

The cry just raised recalls her, causing them to rush towards the frigate's side, and once more bend their eyes on the barque.

No, not on her; only in the direction where she was last seen. For, to their astonishment, the polacca has disappeared!

NATURAL HISTORY AND SPORT OF SOUTH-EASTERN AFRICA.

For those to whom the very name of Game acts as a war-cry, who love danger for daring's sake, and who prefer the skin of some wild beast spread under the open canopy of heaven to the softest couch modern luxuriousness can provide, the Honourable W. H. Drummond's book, entitled *The Game and Natural History of South-eastern Africa*, must prove an acceptable boon. The subject of the natural history of Africa and its game is one full of interest, and a few facts in connection with it we will now lay before our readers. The ground chosen by Mr Drummond as his hunting-field

extended over a wide area from 26° to 29° S. lat.; and he gives us the experience of five years, during which he rarely slept under a roof.

But even in these wild districts, still probably the finest game-country in the world, we find savage beasts like savage races diminishing at the approach of the white man. As our colonies spread, and our colonists penetrate farther and farther inland, the wild animals retreat, or become exterminated. Nor does this cause alone operate to diminish their numbers. The greed of the hunters brings its own punishment, as in the instances of the eland and the elephant. In the former case, the hide being very valuable, and the flesh extremely good eating, the hunters will occasionally kill a whole herd, bull and calf, without a thought for the future. While, as regards the elephant, the improvident greed for present wealth from the sale of ivory, becomes a much more serious affair, involving as it does the ultimate, indeed speedy, extirpation of this interesting and valuable animal. While sympathising with our author, and lamenting the wanton destruction of the eland and elephant, let us stand in imagination on the banks of that Unkomati River, in the far interior of Eastern Africa, where our traveller encamped in the summer of 1870; and with him let us watch the curious habits and customs of the game, which always come at early dawn to the nearest river or water-hole to drink, and perhaps to bathe. Few positions could well be more full of thrilling interest than some that Mr Drummond took, when, hid in the thick branches of a great cabbage-tree, he watched through long nights the various herds of wild animals as they congregated round some pool—rhinoceroses, buffaloes, hyenas, antelopes, all, almost within touching distance, following their time-honoured customs, unconscious of the observant eye of man; while in the fissure of a neighbouring mountain some great owl would entertain himself, and possibly his wife and family, by imitating the cry of the leopard. Many an interesting point in the natural history of these animals was made plain to the observer during these vigils—their relations to each other in the matter of fear or confidence, courage or cowardice. A herd of Koodoo (*Antelope strepsiceros*) stepping silently down to the water with ears intent to catch the faintest sound of danger, would drink, and then as silently retire; while the larger game would often seem unconscious of each other's presence—'a troop of lions sometimes walking past some old rhinoceros bull with its mouth buried in the pool, and laying themselves down, lap the water within a few yards of me.' Or 'some grumbling, ill-tempered *tepetayices*, or two-horned rhinoceros (*R. bicornis*), would come in sight, ploughing up the ground in long furrows, as it pawed it with its foot after the manner of savage bulls, but hardly making the antelopes stir, as he walked past them to the centre of the pool.' But meanwhile great herds of gnu and zebra, and sometimes eland, would stand almost motionless, too thirsty to graze, yet not daring to approach the water, till thirst conquered prudence.

The eager observing of wild animated nature under a starlit sky must have had a wonderful fascination; but when, under a heavy storm, flashes of lightning alone light up and reveal the scene,

the imagination must be even more powerfully stimulated. 'The thickest of the storm is the time lions generally make their appearance.' The power of absolute noiselessness is essential to any one who would become a great and successful hunter; the rustling of a leaf or the breaking of a twig may be fatal. But it must be an art difficult of attainment when penetrating jungle so thick that it can only be traversed on hands and knees; or when, as in the search for buffaloes, the way may lie through tunnels of reeds, in any part of which the animal may lie *perdu*; or, worse still, perhaps, when searching for wounded prey in those marvellous vegetable caves formed of creepers climbing round the thorn-trees, which Mr Drummond tells us are often so regular in their formation as to appear at first sight as if they could not be the work of Nature, but must have been trained by the hand of man. But though, doubtless, the danger possesses in itself a decided charm, European hunters are generally accompanied by natives, whose wonderful skill in spooring—namely, detecting and following the trail of different animals with unerring accuracy—is almost incredible; persistently will they follow some wounded animal, often after long hours of interval, through thicket and open, on through more thicket and open, rarely failing to come up with him at last. Buffaloes, which are the great object of the huntsman's rifle, would, but for the noiselessness above alluded to, generally receive notice of the enemy's approach from the rhinoceros bird, which perches sometimes in whole flocks upon their backs, searching for the great grass ticks on which it subsists, and utters its loud 'tcha, tcha' the moment it detects cause for alarm. This bird is, of course, a great difficulty to the huntsman, since, from its elevated vantage-ground on the top, say, of one of the buffalo's horns, it can survey the scene for a considerable distance. Buffaloes are essentially gregarious; but occasionally the huntsman comes upon a 'rogue,' or solitary bull, that has been worsted in the battle of life, and is an exile self-made, or outcast from his herd. Mr Drummond thinks he is generally one who has been worsted in the fights which are continually taking place; anyhow, this Timon of the jungle is invariably an ill-tempered brute to have to deal with.

It is a curious but well ascertained fact that the dangerousness of animals is by no means in proportion to their size—the smallest species of leopard, lion, rhinoceros, and crocodile, all being the most savage.' Mr Drummond notices this, and also that no two buffaloes even in the same herd are ever exactly alike, or two pair of horns of precisely the same shape. Dr Schweinfurth has also observed this with regard to the central African hartebeest and eland. The remarkable strength of the buffalo is shewn as often in the way he quietly makes a path for himself through the jungle and thick forests, as it is when charging his enemies. Generally speaking, the buffalo does not charge until attacked, and a shot well aimed at the forehead of the cow is almost always fatal, as it is also behind the ear. A bull, on the contrary, is nearly if not quite invulnerable in the forehead, on account of the strength and thickness of bone. There is one vulnerable spot about half an inch just above the eyes, where the bones join, but not one hunter in a hundred succeeds in bringing down an animal from a shot aimed at this spot.

Quickness of observation is essential to the safety as well as success of the hunter.

We have alluded to the wonderful skill of the African in following the trail of the animals he hunts. The requirements of their daily life are such as to sharpen this faculty to a curious point; but we may trust a Scotchman to equal, if not excel them, when any train of reasoning has to be brought to bear upon the subject. Thus, on one occasion, Mr Drummond and two native hunters started in pursuit of a wounded rhinoceros; and after agreeing that one African should accompany him, while the other kept on a parallel line on the opposite side, they entered the thicket. Soon, however, the low whistle of the solitary hunter brought the others to his side, and they found him bending over the fresh print of a rhinoceros's foot. Was it the one they were in search of? became the question, no one particularly desiring to be giving chase to two rhinoceroses at once. Mr Drummond quickly set the question at rest, having previously observed that one of the toes of the wounded animal was unusually small, and that this was undoubtedly the footprint of the same. Those who have given much attention to the natural history of these monsters know how difficult it is to determine how many distinct species are to be found in Africa. Mr Drummond mentions four—two of the so-called white, and two of the black, but objects to this distinction of black and white as misleading. He distinctly states that 'all rhinoceroses are of the same colour—a peculiar shade of brown, or if any difference does exist, it being in *R. bicornis* possessing a tinge of red.' He says, that to different observers in different localities they appear doubtless to be of different colours, but he believes all such cases may be referred to outward circumstances, such as the position of the sun, the kind of mud they have been rolling in, or to the age and sex of the animal. In exemplification of this he mentions having 'watched a bull of the *R. simus* trotting past in the full glare of the mid-day sun, when it has appeared almost white, while, after following the same animal up, and finding it feeding, with the long shadows of evening on it, its colour has then seemed to be as it really is, a deep brown.' To the four species already known to science as *R. bicornis*, *R. Keillora*, *R. simus*, and *R. Osveltii*, Mr Drummond would put in the claim of the *Kulumane* to be regarded as a distinct species, 'though it has not yet received a distinct name or recognition from naturalists.' And he believes he can fully prove that claim. Of all the species, *R. bicornis* is the smallest, most savage, and most to be dreaded. Mr Drummond says he considers it the most dangerous of all African game, often vicious even when unprovoked; an instance of which occurred one night just as the hunting-party were comfortably ensconced round their camp-fire, at which the shoulder and legs of an antelope were roasting. A sudden succession of puffs and the heavy footfall of an animal caused every one to spring to his feet, and betake himself to a tree: this was the work of a moment. In ten seconds the camp-fire was trampled and scattered in all directions, water calabash overturned, blankets burned, and everything that could be got at destroyed by 'the trampling squealing beast.' We may be sure he was not let off easily. He succumbed at last. When wounded, these animals will often wait with the

utmost patience the pursuit of their foe, and then rush at him; and when they do catch an unfortunate being, says Mr Drummond, they knock him down and knead him with their feet, returning again and again, till nothing but a shapeless mass remains, uttering all day their shrill cry of rage. So difficult is the rhinoceros to kill with the spear (the native weapon), that one of the largest native regiments coming across one unexpectedly, the animal charged it; and four men were killed, besides others wounded, and a thousand spears pierced the huge monster's body, before it fell.

One of the difficulties encountered in tracking game arises from the presence of the honey-bird, whose attentions to the hunter are more pertinacious than pleasant, 'the game recognising their cry as denoting the human presence.' On one occasion, Mr Drummond, pestered by the little creature, turned and followed it; at the end of half a mile, it made a peculiar flutter, such as he had formerly seen it do when pointing out a big snake. He approached with the greatest caution, expecting to see a leopard, but found instead a hunter in his employ lying fast asleep.

Among the most noticeable of the fast-diminishing game of Eastern Africa stands the eland, as conspicuous for its beauty as the rhinoceros for its ugliness. The practice of killing them from horseback, in order to secure a larger number for the demands of the market, is so quickly reducing their numbers, that in a few years they will be difficult to find at all. They are beautiful and peaceful creatures, and their gradual extirpation seems a great mistake. Dr Schweinfurth describes them as having short sleek hair of a bright yellow tan colour, and says that in every district through which he passed, he observed their skin to be always marked with well-defined stripes. Mr Drummond, in common with other naturalists, says there is but one species, but two varieties—the common and the striped, the latter found exclusively in South Africa, and gradually lessening in numbers, until, in Central Africa, it entirely gives way to the former. The common kind, he says, exactly resembles the other, except in wanting the markings, and being decidedly inferior in size—the great striped cows rivalling the young bulls of the other variety in their immense proportions. An old blue bull will weigh from fourteen to fifteen hundred pounds. One custom commonly observed among these animals strikes us as the result of at least a very high order of instinct. When one of their number is wounded, and the rest startled, the herd retreats, but halts at intervals, waiting for their wounded companion; at such times, even allowing the hunter to approach very near, rather than desert the injured member of their community. And it is only the stronger instinct of self-preservation which at last compels them to move on without him. A similar instance of clanship, amounting to something strikingly akin to sorrow for bereavement, is recorded of the zebra, of which we read, that in any herd, when one of their number is killed, the rest utter a melancholy wail—a wail never taken up by the other herds which may be about, but uttered exclusively by the one which has lost one of its number.

As before hinted, elephants, through the greed of the hunters, are in many places becoming nearly extinct. There is one point of difference between

the Asiatic and the African elephant of real importance to the hunter: 'in India and Ceylon, the forehead presents a certain mark, while in Africa it is quite impervious.' An elephant charging with his ears spread like 'studding-sails,' his trunk over his head, and trumpeting loudly, must be anything but a despicable foe to encounter. But its great weight prevents it from turning quickly, and the hunter once gaining higher ground, has the decided advantage. Some elephants have a bad habit of getting tipsy on the fruit of a particular tree, and in that condition the natives dread them. On the whole, Mr Drummond rather prefers them in that state, on the principle, that it is safer to quarrel with a drunken man than a sober one. But the game we have enumerated is far from being all that falls to the African huntsman's bag: leopards, to be dreaded more for the virus of their bite, than for any man-eating propensities, often so falsely attributed to them—cowardly, treacherous, and savage, yet so valuable for their skins as to be prey eagerly sought; lions, familiar to us from many a traveller's tale; antelopes of every variety, from the little African klespringer, so like the chamois of the Swiss mountains, to the noble hyala, the great drawback to the pursuit of which is, that 'hyala-shooting and fever are all but synonymous.' Nor must we forget the little Blue Buck or Pete (*Perpurilla*), the smallest antelope in the world, being 'considerably less, as well as much lighter than a hare, with tiny straight horns, scarcely peeping over the little tuft of hair on its forehead.' One of the special pleasures attendant on the shooting of this little animal is, that it leads the sportsman into the very recesses of the African forest. It does not take a very vivid imagination to picture how much he may easily learn from and of Nature there, as he passes, in the cool of the early dawn, under the thick trees, with their wondrous foliage and rich network of creepers, a wild waste of beauty, on which, as if in mockery, some savage old baboon looks silently down; or utters, if he detects the intruder, even though he be 'a man and a brother,' a hoarse bark of alarm.

A LEGEND OF THE THAMES.

'FATHER,' said Ned Moffatt, 'Charley and I have been having a day's fishing in the Thames, and the young fellow Banks, who took us out in the punt, was *such* a character! I'm sure you would have liked him. He told us all sorts of stories about the place, and the people, and the fish, and all about himself when a boy, and how he had been a teetotaler all his life, and that the spot near the weir where we fished for barbel was called Marcus' Deep.—Why, father, are you ill?'

'I shall be well directly, Ned. Let Malcomb take away the dessert, and throw open one of the windows. There, there; I am better now.'

Mr Moffatt was a retired West India merchant, a widower with two sons, for whom he seemed to live, and they returned his love with all the fullness of filial affection. They were home for the holidays from Harrow, and their father was incessantly devising schemes for their pleasure during the few days left of their vacation.

'And was Charley as pleased with his sport and the fishermen as you were, Ned? What did you catch?'

'Oh, we got such a lot of all sorts of fish—gudgeons on the shallows, perch and roach in the quiet water; but the big fellows, those barbel, they did pull so—we got them in Marcus' Deep.'

Again Ned noticed a shadow, a twitch, a spasm, or a compound of all, pass over his father's face, which this time, it was apparent, he attempted to conceal by turning his back and covering his face with both hands.

'Father!' cried both boys, for Charley had noticed the sudden change in his parent likewise, 'what can we do for you? Will you see Dr Seton?'

'No, no!' exclaimed Mr Moffatt; 'it is merely a passing pang from an awakened memory, the recollection of which is too horrible to recall without anguish. Draw your chairs closer, and I will tell you what has disturbed me so. You will be the first to whom I have whispered it, for I did not even make your dear mother the repository of my secret.'

Ned and Charley, struck dumb by the serious voice and visage of their father, mechanically did as they were bid.

'Well, boys,' began Mr Moffatt, 'I was about thirty years of age when I fled this country for the West Indies, making over my affairs to the agency of a friend, to whom I stated neither reasons nor excuse for my sudden departure, or rather my flight. My affairs at the time were prosperous, and therefore no prejudicial suspicion attached to my resolution; at the most, perhaps, amongst my acquaintances, it was thought to be attributable to a love-affair. No. At that time my heart was as free as air, and every circumstance tended to heap fortune and happiness on my head, until one fatal morning! You will perhaps be surprised to hear that, at the period I speak of, the only resource I cared for from the anxieties of business—which, I must say, went smoothly and easily with me—was that of angling, that art, the love for which you appear to have inherited from me, and to which attachment I have scarcely ever trusted myself to allude until now. Saturdays were the days appropriated during the season to my favourite pursuit. In order to follow it to the full, I rented and furnished a little cottage on the banks of the Thames. There I used to run down on the Friday night, be up with the sun in the morning, and find my fisherman ready with tackle, punt, and all needful to get afloat. This was now the happiest portion of my life, for the confinement of the previous part of the week in murky London prepared me for a pleasure keen and intense. Then the calmness and sweet peace of the succeeding day more than armed me for the recurring city routine. Well, the last Saturday that I ever held a rod or saw the morning mists clear off from the Thames, I was out long before their dewy were dispelled, and found my man, as usual, punctual, and waiting for me. After I had got on board, however, I recollected that I had left some tackle I should require, and throwing my bunch of keys to my fisherman, bade him hasten and fetch it from the cottage. He was longer gone than I expected, and when he did come back, I noticed that he was the worse for drink. His speech was thick and incoherent. He was more than usually loquacious; and a something of disrespect towards me, which I had never before noticed in his mode of address, assured me he had

been drinking while absent on his message, and thus had broken a sacred pledge he had made to me to abstain from liquor. This promise he had hitherto observed with exemplary fidelity. I made no comment upon his condition as he sprawled, rather than stepped, into the punt, hoping the fresh morning air and the hard exercise he must undergo against the current before we got to the weir, would restore him to sobriety. As we took advantage of the back eddies, to get to a particular spot where we purposed to tie the punt to one of the stanchions of the weir, a trout of formidable size threw itself high out of the water, and came down with a heavy splash, the noise of which could be heard over the roar of the fall of the weir.

"Do you know," he remarked with a hiccup, "that the whole of the time, man and boy, I've been a Thames fisherman I never caught a Thames trout! I get precious chaffed by my fellows, as most of 'em have had some, and many of 'em their half-dozen of that fish. There he is again! If he's one he's twelve pounds, and I intends having him, or"—— And here followed a savage oath.

'We had now got close to the piles of the weir. The man, however, instead of putting my rod together, as he always did, preparing it with spinning-bait for my use, and seeing me fully at work before he did anything else, deliberately arranged his own tackle, muttering the while: "Ah! I intend to have that trout—Bill Smith and Harry Jones shall have no more shies at me on that hook—or," &c.

'Thus far I let him have his own way. But when he began to stagger about the punt, and nearly caught me, now in the face, and now by the legs, with the row of hooks, in his clumsy attempts to cast the line, which he stumbled over, trod upon, and got entangled about him, I thought it time to expostulate. This was useless. He had got it into his besotted brain that I was some "pal," as he called me, whom he had honoured by bringing out to see him catch his first Thames trout. I then insisted upon his putting me ashore, for our position, as the punt swung round in the boiling waters, threatening now and then to suck us beneath the fall and swamp us, was more than critical. But he was deaf to all threats or persuasions. The trout he must have, or meet the fury of another element. Under these circumstances, I did what I had often done before on less urgent occasions; I got out, and steadying myself by the timbers, mounted the sill or fixed beam of the weir itself, which having no guiding rail, the footing depended entirely upon a steady eye and firm nerve, the more as the running water over it had, although but ankle deep, a constant inclination to carry one off his feet. Here with my spinning rod, which I had with some difficulty managed to bring upon the weir, I had every advantage, and casting very far down the stream, spun my bait, a small bleak, slowly back; and when about half the line was gathered in, I felt a tremendous rush, which carried nearly all my line off the reel. I was, therefore, at once conscious I had hold of a formidable trout, and I played it with my usual coolness and skill, for such prey were not strangers to me, either in that river or in other waters. My operations had up to this point been unobserved by my man, who was otherwise occupied. The

beautiful creature, however, throwing itself out of the water in one of its noble efforts for freedom, attracted the fisherman's attention. He uttered a loud curse, threw his rod down in the punt in evident rage, then, to my intense surprise, floundered out of the punt on to the apron of the weir, and commenced scrambling up to the top of it. This was an event I certainly did not anticipate. That it was this madman's design to contest with me the capture of the fish, I was soon made certain by his every gesture. And now my fear was that the fellow, in the state he was in, would not be able to keep his equilibrium—that he would fall over, get washed off the apron before he could recover himself, and be plunged into the pool, from which, if he once got amongst the dead-water under the swirl, nothing but the greatest presence of mind, and a full knowledge of the peculiar nature of the currents, could possibly save him. Still he came on to me with his arms outstretched, balancing himself upon the narrow and slippery beam which formed the crown of the weir, like a boy walking on a rail. When he got within arm's-length of me, I warned him to keep his distance, and earnestly besought him to recollect that he was jeopardising two lives by his desperately rash and unaccountable conduct.

"Give me the rod!" he shouted, with an awful imprecation. "The fish is mine. I will have it; I spotted it first. Give me the rod, I say!" He now literally foamed at the mouth with excitement. He clutched me with one hand by the shoulder, and I felt the gripe of the maniac (so tenacious was his grasp) take up the muscle with my clothes. With the other hand he made a snatch at the rod, which was on my left, which he had to get partly in front of me to reach. I would have resigned the tackle willingly at this juncture. It was too late. In his exertions to seize the rod, he had thrown himself out of balance, and feeling himself going over, he seized me by the waistcoat with the hand at liberty, and the next moment we were both rolling over and over and down the apron. A heavy splash, and all was blank. Being, however, a skilful swimmer, and life at that moment my first consideration, I kept my head downwards, as my only chance to rid myself of the embarrassing hold of my companion, which at once relaxed, when I became free to act. Knowing that if I attempted to rise to the surface in the spot I was I should only be carried under again, and that if this was repeated two or three times I should become exhausted, I struck for the bottom, and there found it dark and comparatively still. Here a thought flashed across my mind, by no means reassuring, for I had often reflected that if I ever reached that spot, the probability was that I should be sucked under, and never come up again. Instead, therefore, of attempting to rise, I crawled and swam a dozen yards or so on the shingle, until I saw the sheen of day above, which I knew from its transparency to be the still water of the eddy between the lashers. Now or never! and up I went, rising, as I expected, in the eddy, which whirled me several times round, and then carried me into the run of the water. At this moment, my alarm was great at finding I was tightly fastened to something. I summoned courage, and ascertained that I had got entangled in my line, but, thanks to the confidence I had acquired from my swimming-master in what he called ornamental buoyancy, I

threw myself on my back, and after a little manœuvring, the current carried the line clear. Then a few vigorous strokes took me into the back eddy, and I swam into wadeable water. I may here tell you that to try to rise in any other way in such an emergency is hopeless. Several persons have been drowned in the pools of these weirs on the Thames, and their bodies have been invariably found in the cavity worked by the water, with their hands stretched out, as if endeavouring to push themselves off, but were held there by the suction.

Here Mr Moffatt paused, took a long breath, and finding that his two boys were perfectly transfixed with painful suspense and attention, proceeded.

"Well, directly I could look back, I scanned every portion of the waters, but could not see anything of poor Marcus."

"Marcus!" exclaimed the boys—"Marcus' Deep!"

"Yes, that was the poor fellow's name, and I have had his death lying like a frozen chill upon my conscience ever since."

"But, father"—interposed Charley.

"I know, my boy, what you would say: that it was the man's own fault; that he might have been my murderer as well as his own. I have thought of all that. But it affords no consolation, as, knowing the state the man was in, I ought at once to have surrendered the tackle, and given way to his whim. No; the man was not responsible for his actions, in one sense, and I cannot shake off from myself the feeling of guilt."

"And now, boys, you have heard the story of poor Marcus, whose untimely end has been on your father's conscience for many a year."

That night, as Ned and Charley lay in bed together, they talked in bated breath over what they had heard, and pitied their father from their innermost hearts.

"I'll tell you what, Charley," said Ned suddenly, "I must know more about this affair. No harm can be done if I don't talk about it, but I am determined to learn more by the water-side. Look here, Charley—was Marcus' body ever found?"

"I think you had better leave the body alone," said Charley with a movement between a yawn and a shiver, and the next minute he was fast asleep.

Ned kept awake that night, thinking, and the more he thought, the more was his course the only one that offered any solution to the mystery, if any, of the sad story. As soon as the morning dawned, he was out of bed, dressed, and off with his fishing-rod and basket by the first train. He found the fisherman in his front garden, digging worms for his eel-pots, and as he was not otherwise engaged for the day, he was ready to go afloat. So, after providing a small hamper of refreshments at the inn, they were soon punting against the stream for Marcus' Deep.

"How long, Banks, do you say it is since you have not drunk beer, or that sort of thing?" asked Ned, as he saw the fisherman take a swig of cold tea after his exertion.

"Ever since I was *that* high," replied the man, placing his hand about a couple of feet above the gunnel of the punt; "ever since I was six year old; and I'm wondrously thankful for this very place we are now fishing for that, though it did no good to some one else."

"No good to some one else," thought Ned

mentally. 'Suppose, Banks, we have two or three more balls of ground-bait in. Did the anglers fish here much after the fisherman was drowned?' he inquired with as much indifference as he could affect.

'There has been no fisherman drowned here that I ever recollect, although one was very nigh to. A gentleman was. But even at this time o' day—for it's twenty year ago—it don't do for me to speak of it, and if you please, sir, I'd rather not talk about it.'

'But it's called Marcus' Deep because a fisherman of that name'—

'Well, sir, you'll excuse me, but I never speak about it more than I can help, and I'd rather not.'

'But,' continued Ned persistently, 'do I understand you to say that there was no fisherman drowned here, but that a gentleman was?'

'I don't know how I have come to say so much,' said Banks, with evident emotion; 'but when I tell you that there are persons living who might get into very great trouble if I was to gabble any more, I am sure, sir, as a gentleman, you will excuse my holding quiet.'

Ned, whose whole anxiety was for his father, tacitly acquiesced in the wisdom of silence.

That day, at dinner, Ned much startled Mr Moffatt by telling him he had been again to Marcus' Deep. Indeed, his father was shocked to learn that the recital of his secret should have had so little effect. Ned, seeing what was passing in his father's mind, without further preface or preparation, remarked: 'Why, father, I have heard to-day that instead of the fisherman being drowned in that weir pool, it was the gentleman.'

'The gentleman?'

'Yes, indeed; it was the gentleman, and not the fisherman.'

'Are you certain of this, Ned?' ejaculated his father, starting to his feet. 'Can this be true? The very possibility of that poor man having escaped has never occurred to me. No, no,' he added with a groan, and sinking into a tone of deep sadness; 'he could only have been saved by a miracle.'

'But, father,' urged Ned, 'Banks the fisherman told me he knew all about the affair. He told me the fisherman was *not* drowned, and the gentleman was. If he is correct—which you can now easily ascertain—you have only to make yourself known in confidence, and Banks, I am sure, will tell you all. When I left him, I begged him not to engage himself for to-morrow, as I meant to bring a gentleman down with me to fish, who, years ago, used to be very fond of the place.'

'Meaning me?' observed Mr Moffatt, his hopes again reviving. 'We will go to-morrow, Ned; it is a matter that I cannot now delay an hour unnecessarily.'

Next morning found Mr Moffatt and his two boys afloat with Banks; and Ned watching his father closely, saw how greatly the scene of the weir and its turbulent waters affected him, although it was so many years since the event had occurred which had thrown its shadow over the whole of that period.

When properly moored, Mr Moffatt's impatience being wrought to the highest, he broke the subject at once, and was induced, as the best plan of getting at the facts which Banks could render, to tell him he knew the gentleman supposed to have been drowned, and that he was alive, if not well.

Banks's delight at this revelation was great, so unbounded indeed, and expressed in such grateful and vivid terms, that it even exceeded that of Mr Moffatt, who began to see plainly that this manifestation closely concerned his own happiness. Banks, therefore, now having no longer any cause for taciturnity, related all he knew of the occurrence. But we will let him tell his own story, almost in his own words.

'My father, Marcus Banks—better known as Marcus the fisherman—was a great favourite with a gentleman who used to come down in the summer to that little white cottage you see near the ferry yonder. I believe my father equally liked his customer, for by his influence he had become, from being often unable to go out with gentlemen, from too much drink, a regular sober steady man, respected by his neighbours, spoken well of, and often recommended as the best man in the village by our clergyman. One night—the last I saw my father for years; I was then but a snap of a lad—he told me he expected the gentleman down from London, and that he had been all the afternoon getting baits and other things, so as to have a good day's sport. It was late before he came to bed, and he was then as sober as usual; and I recollect no more than being slightly disturbed when he got up at twilight in the morning, and left me to fall asleep again. I don't know what time it was when I was suddenly awakened by the door being burst in, and father dripping wet, his hair on end, his eyeballs starting out of his head, and his whole body trembling as if he had had the palsy, throwing himself with a wild scream across the bed. I started up in my fright, and listened with horror to my father accusing himself of murdering—coldly murdering his customer by throwing him off the weir. His wailings and writhings were fearful. He seemed wholly unconscious of what he did. One moment he would stand up and declare he didn't do it, with the most awful appeals to Heaven; the next, he would fall on his knees and beg for mercy. "Don't hang me, don't hang me!" he would scream; and then he would sob like a child, as though his very heart were bursting. For some while—an age to me—he seemed not to know of my being there, and then, when he did so, he seized me in his arms, kissed and fondled me, and asked me what was to become of me when he was gone. Then he pushed me away from him, and screamed again: "I will tell you all; but don't hang me; spare me, spare me, for my poor lad's sake! Look here. Gentleman wanted something from the cottage. He gave me his keys. I opened the wrong cupboard, and there a bottle of brandy toppled over, and broke at the neck. Some of the cursed spirit fell on the shelf, and ran dripping off. I caught it in the palm of my hand and drank it—the first I had tasted for years, as Heaven is my judge. One sup led to another, and I filled a tea-cup again and again, and drank. I know of little more but that the punt was full of my mates trying to cheat me out of a large trout I had gone out to catch; they jeered and mocked all my attempts to get it, and one after another got out of the punt to avoid me, on to the weir, where I followed them; and I struggled to get the fish with the first fellow I came up to, and—and, as I went down in the water, I saw it was my customer I was drowning."

'These were his words, gentlemen, as near as I can remember. Then he started up again, and muttered that he must be off—that the police were after him, and rushed to an old chest of drawers, scrambled up together a few clothes, and the next moment I was alone, rubbing my eyes, thinking all was a dream. There was plenty to eat in the house, but all that day I should have choked had I attempted to swallow a morsel; and as night drew on and my father did not return, I began fully to believe that he had committed some frightful offence, and that I was deserted. In the latter respect, however, I was wrong, for the latch was lifted, and a woman entered the room, and said she had come to fetch me. I was so bewildered, and thinking perhaps she was going to take me to my father, I made no objection; and she took me to a pretty little cottage about three miles from this, on the common. There I was well clothed and fed, and when old enough, was sent to school as her adopted child. I did all I could to shew my benefactress that I was grateful, but I always yearned after the water and my father's pursuits. So, as I was considered able to manage a punt, one was bought for me, and I was set up in the house in which I was born, as a fisherman. I am sorry to say my benefactress is since dead.'

'Poor Jane Scott,' sighed Mr Moffatt, 'she was housekeeper to my friend, whom your father supposed to be drowned.—And of your father?'

'Well, sir, I heard that he went wandering about for some months under a feigned name, living the best way he could, and that now and then he used to come over to these parts in disguise, to get a look at me. One day, about two years ago, old, and worn, and ragged as he was, he was known by something he let fall in his inquiries at the bar of a beer-house, and a few of the villagers hearing of it, took pity on him, kept his secret, and got him into Moffatt's alms-houses.'

'Moffatt's alms-houses!' exclaimed both Ned and Charley.

'Yes,' went on the fisherman; 'they were founded by a gentleman in the West Indies, who is said to have done so in gratitude for some reason or other we never learned the rights on.'

'Your father is living, then?' asked Mr Moffatt eagerly.

'That he is, sir; and he is hale and hearty, but bowed with the weight of the secret he fancies his life depends upon the keeping. You will see him, sir, waiting for me on our landing, for this is the day in each week he comes down for a dish of eels to treat the old men and women at the alms-houses.'

We need not dwell upon the meeting of the two 'drowned' men, nor attempt to describe the exquisite joy of all concerned, as the way was led by the fisherman's son up to Moffatt's alms-houses, where the founder shared for the first time in the happiness of the recipients. He now learned from Marcus Banks himself that he was miraculously saved from drowning by his coming up to the surface between the stanchion of the weir and the punt—that he had clung to the latter for some time before his weakness and condition permitted him to get into it, which accounted for Mr Moffatt not being able to see him, and presuming him to be lost. Having got into the punt, he lay for some time insensible; but when he recovered, and had realised the awful nature of his

situation, he hastened ashore, sought his home in the state his son described, and fled, to follow a vagabond and precarious, and infinitely worse, a haunted life for years.

The bells of the village church were set ringing that evening, rejoicings were general as well as at the alms-houses; the next Sunday, the vicar improved the occasion by a sermon on the events. The cottage was again set in order; and Mr Moffatt, now more often than in his younger days, seeks with his sons, when they can be spared from their studies, and with young Banks, the pleasure round and about the once dreaded, and supposed fatal, Marcus' Deep.

BRIDGING GREAT INTERVALS OF TIME.

THE late Dr R. CHAMBERS, in certain papers in these pages, in 1833 and 1839, gave some amusing instances of the manner in which distant ages may be connected by the lives of individuals—for instance, a person we know may have spoken to another who had been an eye-witness of moving historical events more than a hundred years ago.

The subject is one that may from time to time be interestingly adverted to. The circumstances which have passed under the notice of a single long-lived individual are sometimes matter of wonder to the young. The late Lord Lyndhurst lived till 1868; yet he had seen the birth, growth, and maturity of the republic of the United States of America, for he was born in Massachusetts, at a time when that and the other eastern states were British plantations or colonies. In his ninety-two years of life, he had seen the whole history of the great republic. In 1874 died Paymaster Thorne, the oldest naval officer in the Queen's service; for he received his first commission in the days when Lord Nelson was still living, fighting, and conquering. Still more remarkable was the case of the late Field-marshal Viscount Combermere; he was a commissioned officer in the British army in 1791, and a commissioned officer he was in 1865, when death carried him off at the age of ninety-two. During his passage through all the military grades from ensign to field-marshal, he had been conversant with the wars relating to two republics, two empires, and several monarchies in France. Most noteworthy fact of all, Combermere and the great Napoleon had been subaltern officers in the self-same year, the one (English) as Ensign Cotton, the other (French) as Lieutenant Bonaparte; and yet Napoleon has been dead more than half a century! When George IV. visited Edinburgh in 1822, he had an interview with one of the men who had fought for Prince Charlie in 1745; the king pleasantly welcomed him as 'the last of his enemies.' One Mr Evans, who died in 1780, was wont to speak of having witnessed the execution of Charles I. in 1649; but this assertion is sadly in need of corroboration.

When two aged persons are concerned, the one born shortly before the death of the other, a much longer space of time may be bridged over by a retentive memory. James Horrocks, born in 1744, and surviving till 1844, was the son of William Horrocks, who was born in 1657, during the Protectorate of Cromwell. James, therefore, in the present reign of Victoria, could talk of his sire having been contemporaneous with the stirring events consequent on the downfall of the first

Charles. If these dates are correct, William must have been more than eighty years of age when his son James was born. Mr and Mrs S. C. Hall, when travelling in Ireland in 1840, were introduced to a venerable man who could tell them that his father had been present at the battle of the Boyne, a hundred and fifty years previously, when a boy of fifteen; this was possible if the father was (say) seventy-five when the son was born, and the latter ninety at the date of the interview. The Earl of Mansfield, in 1787, narrated that he had conversed with a man who had witnessed the execution of Charles I. In 1823 Mr Andrew Coventry stated that he had dined with the mother-in-law of the Young Pretender, Prince Charlie. This strange connecting of two periods was thus explained. Princess Stolberg had a daughter, Louisa, who married the Pretender in 1773, when he had become a middle-aged man; there was an interval of eighty-five years between the birth of Prince Charlie and Mr Coventry; yet the latter had dined with the Princess Stolberg, when she was a venerable dame of ninety. Lord Torphichen, living in 1862, had an uncle who was an officer in the royal army in 1745, fighting at the battle of Prestonpans; and another uncle who, as a boy, was concerned in a so-called witch adventure in 1720: facts which seem to shew that the Torphichens were a tough old race. James Stuart the architect, known, for his classical knowledge, as Athenian Stuart, died in 1788, at the age of seventy-six; he had a posthumous son born in that year, and this son lived to be Commander Stuart of the royal navy, who was living till 1861, if not later: the father and son between them thus covered a hundred and forty-nine years at the least.

The following are further instances belonging to the same class. In 1713 a venerable matron was living who might, in one sense, have been called a niece of Mary, Queen of Scots. It arose thus: Francis II. of France was the first husband of the hapless Mary, he being at the time of the marriage, in 1558, fifteen years of age, and known as the Dauphin; he became king in the following year, but died after a reign of only a few months. His brother succeeded him as Charles IX. in 1560, and had a natural son, to whom the title of Duc d'Angoulême was given; this king died in 1574. The duke's widow lived on to 1741, when she died in extreme old age. She, therefore, survived her father-in-law by no less than a hundred and thirty-nine years; and as Francis and Charles were brothers, she was, therefore, a kind of step-niece of Mary, Queen of Scots. In another instance, a gentleman, living in 1872, was the son of a person born in 1722; the two thus bridging over a hundred and fifty years between them. If the father was (say) fifty-five when the son was born, and the latter lived to the age of ninety-five, this would fulfil the conditions. Maurice O'Connell, father (we believe) of the great agitator, died in 1825, at the advanced age of ninety-nine; in his youth, he had known an aged man, named Daniel McCarthy, who had been present at the battle of Aughrim in 1691—a man had seen a man who had witnessed an event a hundred and thirty-four years before the decease of the former. The Countess of Loudoun, widow of the third earl, was born in 1677, and lived to be almost exactly a hundred years old; she was

attended professionally by Dr John Mackenzie, who survived till 1841. In this case, a medical man, in the reign of Victoria, could say that he had attended a lady born in the reign of Charles II.—covering the reigns of eight intervening sovereigns. Dr Routh, President of Magdalen College, Oxford, held his presidency to the day of his death in 1854, when he had entered upon his hundredth year; when a young collegian, he knew Dr Theophilus Leigh, who had been Master of Balliol College at the time when Addison was an Oxford student, about the year 1695. This was a clear leap of more than a century and a half covered by two learned men during their academical career. Sir Stephen Fox, born in the first half of the seventeenth century, had a family by his first wife; and one of his sons was Paymaster of the Forces in 1679. He survived his wife and all the children; married again at an advanced age in Queen Anne's reign; had two more sons; and one of these sons became the father of the celebrated statesman, Charles James Fox. The statesman, therefore, just before his death in 1806, might have said: 'An uncle of mine was a member of the government a hundred and twenty-seven years ago.' The case of Commodore Pickernell was another remarkable one. This tough old sailor, who died in 1859, at the age of eighty-seven, knew in his youth an old man who could tell of having been encamped as a soldier on Hounslow Heath at the time of the Revolution in 1688. When quieter days came, the soldier played as a bandsman at the coronation of Queen Anne; and next served throughout the Duke of Marlborough's campaigns. There is something a little startling about these dates; but, as Pickernell was barely eight years old, and the veteran a little over a hundred, when they met, the difficulty may be solved by supposing that the soldier was very young (say a drummer-boy) at the time of encamping on Hounslow Heath.

A distinct series of these curious phenomena is presented when *three* persons are concerned in transmitting the record. Mr Ramage, in 1872, communicated to one of the journals the following: 'When I was a boy, I was acquainted with an old woman named Margaret Clench, who lived in a cottage within the Drumlanrig domain, at a short distance from Drumlanrig Castle. She had in her youth been in attendance on Catharine Hyde, the wife of Duke Charles of Queensberry. Duke Charles was born in 1698.' Thus, a gentleman writing in 1872 could say that he had seen a woman who had seen a man who was born in 1698; the space of time included being one hundred and seventy-four years. William Oldys, the learned bibliographer, who died in 1761, had known a lady who connected him with Waller the poet, born in 1605. The facts and dates stood thus: When James II.'s younger daughter was still Princess Anne, and he still undisturbed by the Revolution of 1688, one of her maids of honour was a daughter of Sir John Talbot; she paid a visit to Waller when he was eighty years old; and she herself, when a venerable widow, Viscountess de Longueville, was visited by Oldys, at that time a septuagenarian. Mr Frank Buckland, writing to *Land and Water* in 1872, stated that Dr Routh of Magdalen College (whose name we have already had occasion to mention) had in his youth seen an old woman who in her youth

had seen Charles II. walking in Oxford with his favourite spaniel. There seems, however, to be one intermediate life omitted here; for in a notice in the *Times* of Dr Routh's death, 1854, we learn that 'he had been told by a lady of her aunt, who had seen Charles II. walking with his dogs in Oxford in 1665.' There were thus *two* ladies and Dr Routh to connect the widely-distant dates. Mr Buckland mentioned another case, of a friend, Mr H—, who told him that when ten years old he used to sit on his grandmother's knee, and listen to her account of what took place in 1745, when she was eleven years old; that she was at that date residing at a farmhouse in the western part of the county of Durham; that some of the adherents of the Young Pretender passed that way; that she assisted her mother in succouring them with bread, cheese, beer, and other refreshments; and she recollected that the poor fellows fell on their knees, and thanked in Gaelic their kind hostess. Now, Mr H— had a daughter born in 1868; if she lives to the age of eighty, she will be able to say: 'My great-grandmother fed some of Prince Charlie's troops more than two hundred years ago.'

Dependent on a similar number of lives are some other instances which deserve brief notice. The Scottish newspapers in 1766 recorded the birth of a child to Lady Nicolson of Glenbervie; her husband, Sir William, was ninety-two years old at the time, having married his second wife when he was eighty-two; there was an interval of sixty-six years between the birth of his first daughter by his first wife and his youngest daughter by his second wife. We have no record of the death of this youngest daughter, but supposing her to have lived beyond her eightieth year, she might have said in 1846: 'My father was born a hundred and seventy-two years ago, in the time of Charles II.; and my eldest sister was born a hundred and forty-six years ago.' This case was a specially remarkable one, in one at least of its features. More within the ordinary run, but still noteworthy, was the instance of Dr Franklin, who was the grandson of a man born in the time of Queen Elizabeth; Benjamin Franklin himself died in 1790; and thus he, his father, and grandfather, covered two centuries. About the year 1539 was born Miss Lettice Knollys, who eventually became by marriage Countess of Essex in 1556, Countess of Leicester in 1578, and Lady Blount in 1589. This courtly lady, who did not quit the scene of life till 1634, was a great-niece of Anne Boleyn, and might, very probably, as a little girl, have seen Henry VIII.; she certainly saw Edward VI., Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, James I., and Charles I. Lettice belonged to a family very retentive of life; for her father reached the age of eighty-five, one brother eighty-six, another brother ninety-nine, and herself ninety-five. Another courtly lady was in a position to say, shortly before her death in 1858: 'King Charles II. was present at the marriage of my grandfather, and gave away the bride nearly a hundred and ninety years ago.' This leaping over a wide gap of time seems rather startling; but the facts and dates arrange themselves in the following way: James, the fifth Earl of Balcarras, was a naval officer in the service of Queen Anne; he had come to the earldom as successor to his father, the fourth earl; Charles II., near the close of his reign, had given away the bride at the first

marriage of this fourth earl; of the years of birth and death of the two noblemen we need not take account; but Earl James's daughter Elizabeth became Countess of Hardwicke, and survived to a very advanced age in 1858.

It has been pointed out that when George IV. ascended the throne in 1820, the self-same decorations of the Order of the Garter which he then received were those which had been worn by his ancestor, Charles II.; and it was a remarkable fact that there had been only two intermediate holders in that long period. Charles II. conferred them on the Duke of Somerset, who retained them till his death at an advanced age in 1748. They were then conferred on the young Prince of Wales, at that time a boy of eleven or twelve years of age; he retained them for no less than seventy-two years, twelve as Prince, and sixty as King George III.; after which they passed to his eldest son, George IV. The Duke of Somerset and George III. between them held the decorations uninterruptedly for a hundred and forty years. In a most unusual degree was the duke a participator in courtly ceremonies wherein stars and garters are more or less likely to be worn; under no less than six sovereigns in succession; for he was one of the pall-supporters at the funeral of Charles II., the bearer of the orb at the coronation of James II., the bearer of the queen's crown at the coronation of William and Mary, the supporter of the chief mourner at the funeral of King William, the bearer of the orb at the coronation of Queen Anne, again its bearer at the coronation of George I., and once again at that of George II.

With regard to the historical value of these remarkable leaps over wide intervals of time, it may be well to bear in mind that the fewer the intermedia, the persons concerned in handing down the testimony, the less likely is the story to grow untruthful by repetition. On the other hand, some of them are exposed to the influence of defective memory in old age. When a garrulous old man talks about the events of his youth, he is not always reliable as to dates, though honestly intending to speak the truth. Nevertheless, after making all necessary deductions, these phenomena as to memory are certainly worthy of attention.

THE AXOLOTL

AMONG the later additions to the Brighton Aquarium is the Axolotl (pronounced A-chólatl) or Ajolote, a curious creature, which has perplexed naturalists ever since its first introduction to the scientific world. The singularity of this creature consists in its being one of those animal existences properly termed 'Protean'—partaking partly of the character of a fish, and partly that of a reptile—and in its possessing certain other strange physiological distinctions, too abstruse for the general reader. Any one desiring scientific elucidation on the subject will find it so treated in a paper read by Sir Everard Home before the Royal Society so long ago as 1824, and published in the *Transactions* for that year. We shall here confine ourselves to giving a brief account of this Protean in regard to its habits, habitat, and the uses to which it is put by the people inhabiting the Valley of Mexico—the only place where we have any account of its having been found. And just a word about its structure and appearance.

As all know who have seen it in the tanks of the Aquarium, it bears resemblance to a gigantic newt or salamander; at the same time the possession of 'gills,' with other points of similarity to the finny tribe, suggest its being something of a fish. Its size, as commonly seen, is from that of a sprat to a herring; but specimens have been taken of much greater dimensions—some measuring sixteen inches in length; its long tapering tail included in the measurement. It has a large head, with a widely extended mouth, the tongue being flat, thin, and cartilaginous. In lieu of fins, it has four feet, somewhat like those of a lizard or frog, and by these it propels itself frog-fashion through the water. Its colour is a mixture of black and white, with some variety in the markings according to age and sex.

The axolotl is an inhabitant of the great salt lake Tezcoco—the largest of the six lakes (formerly there were but five) now existing in the Valley of Mexico; and as far as is known, it is confined to this one, the water of most of the others being fresh, and seemingly not suitable to its existence. Tezcoco is now of much smaller extent than at the time of the Mexican Conquest. Then it washed the walls of Tenochtitlan, the ancient capital of the Aztec Empire, completely encircling it. At present, the lake's edge is more than a league from the suburbs of the modern city of Mexico, which occupies the same site as did Tenochtitlan. Notwithstanding its contracted dimensions, Tezcoco is still a grand sheet of water, having a superficial area of over one hundred square miles. Its depth, however, is but small, no part of it being more than four English feet, according to a series of one hundred and twenty-seven soundings, taken by a scientific commission, under the directions of the Mexican government. Humboldt gives its depth, at the date of his visit, 1803, from three to five French metres. The great traveller must either have been misinformed—the soundings of the lake not then having been scientifically verified—or it has since shallowed by evaporation and silting up. The water is extremely salt, and no fish can live in it, with the exception of here and there, at the mouths of certain fresh-water affluent streams, some diminutive minnow-like species, by the Mexicans called 'juiles.' But these never venture out to the body of the lake, which is left to the axolotl, which alone finds its saline character congenial. Even upon these shores vegetation scarcely shews itself, or only in a few stunted plants of species that thrive best in soil impregnated with saline particles. All around Tezcoco we see sterility equalling that of the Sahara, the surface of the adjacent plains, with such scant herbage as appears upon them, being covered with a white efflorescence like hoar-frost.

In this Dead Sea of the western hemisphere dwells this strange animal. But although having all the lake's water to itself, it is not left either undisturbed or unmolested. Cranes, pelicans, and other predatory wading-birds make war upon it; and it has furthermore to fear man. For, despite its somewhat repulsive appearance, it is esteemed as an article of food, and is in consequence an object of piscatorial capture. The 'lake Indian'—descendant of the Aztecs—is its greatest enemy. He not only pursues it with avidity, but eats it with the greatest gusto; to him it is a tit-bit, a *bonne bouche*. And indeed others besides the

aborigines often deign to partake of its flesh, which they say is white, delicate, and savoury. Skinned, and broiled, it is not only eatable, but fairly palatable; while it is also supposed to possess valuable medicinal properties. Doctors recommend it for inflammation of the liver and hectic fever; and it is considered healthful food for children. A syrup compounded from the gelatinous portions of the body, with certain herbs, is sold in the apothecaries' shops of Mexico, as a mucilage beneficial in pulmonary complaints.

The axolotl did not escape observation by the historians of the Mexican Conquest. Clavigero, Sahagun, and others of the early writers, have each given account of it—all deeming it an odd animal—some of them believing it to be in an imperfect or undeveloped state, as the tadpole before its final transformation to a frog.

The light of science first thrown upon it by Humboldt, but more fully by Sir Everard Home, has dispelled these erroneous ideas; though still leaving doubtful many points in the zoological affinity of this singular aquatic creature.

THE REAPERS.

THE reapers bend their lusty backs;
Their sounding sickles away;
At every stroke the golden sea
Recedes to give them way;
The heavy ears fall bowing down,
And nestle at their feet.
Such will, such work as theirs, perforce,
Must win—must homage meet.

So careless of fatigue they go,
So true, so steadily,
The admiring traveller on the road
Leans o'er the gate to see;
With marvel of the soon-fallen breadth,
The lounging gossips tell;
But the reapers labour for us all;
'Tis need they should work well.

Ere the great sun that burns above
Shall crimson in the west,
And the children's poppy nosegays fade,
And they lie down to rest,
Each golden spear that upward points
Shall fall upon the field,
And the farmer drain a sparkling glass,
Rejoicing o'er the yield.

Ply, bonny men, your sickles bright,
And give the people bread!
At every conquering stride you take,
On want and woe you tread.
Drop, heavy ears, and give the strength
You gathered from this plain,
That man may rise refreshed and firm,
And do great things again.

God bless the hands, all hard and brown,
That guide the cleaving plough,
That cast abroad the shining seed,
And build the wealthy mow;
They rear the bread our children eat;
'Tis by their toil we live;
Hurrah! give them the loudest cheer
That grateful hearts can give!

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